

Brownlow, Kellie

From: Brownlow, Kellie
Sent: Monday, July 20, 2015 4:03 PM
To: 'Chapman, Leroy (CMG-Atlanta)'
Subject: FW: AJC questions about Connect Cobb

Leroy,

Mr. Klepal may have sent questions to Ms. DiMassimo about BRT. However, as you can see from the original email below, the Chairman was cc'd and no questions were posed directly to Chairman Lee. It is not the job of the chairman to speak for nor manage county department heads. That is the job of the County Manager.

Your response is very disappointing after a seemingly constructive dialogue last week. It seems you have decided to believe the story that Mr. Klepal is giving about the meeting last week. He was not honest when he said he asked about ethics. I have several people who can attest to his question about campaign finance. Further, there are people who can attest to the fact that his storming up the stairs behind the dais is highly unusual and uncommon which is very different from the Mr. Klepal's story. I welcome you to speak with others present, like the county attorney, who witnessed Mr. Klepal's behavior that night. It is disappointing that it seems the AJC is not seeking an objective approach to this.

I was under the impression that we were hitting the reset button in our communications last Thursday. When I received questions last week we provided answers within 2 hours. However, when Mr. Klepal repeatedly takes gratuitous attacks at Chairman Lee it becomes very difficult to have a constructive working relationship. Further, I really don't appreciate the implied charge you seem to be leveling. I am aware of other counties, other than the one you cited, who have had the same unprofessional experience with Mr. Klepal. It is disappointing that all other news media, including others at the AJC, can report the news in a fair and honest way.

Please print the following statement in response to today's news article: Contrary to the reporter's statement, never once in the process of writing this article was Chairman Lee asked any direct questions for this story.

Again, I welcome the opportunity to discuss this further. I thought we were moving in the right direction last week but it seems that is not the case.

Kellie

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Ms. Brownlow,

Thanks for calling and emailing. Thanks for asking about the weekend. I worked. National tragedy in Chattanooga, Tenn. required my attention. I hope yours was more enjoyable.

I spoke to Dan and to his editor Todd Duncan.

Dan forwarded me questions that had been posed to the chairman and to Faye that went unanswered. According to the email timestamp, they went to Chairman Lee's professional and personal email box. Additionally, he provided details about his encounter with Chairman Lee at the commission meeting last week, where he refused to speak to Dan. Non-response to email inquiry with specific questions about BRT and an emphatic, flat denial of an interview request made clear to Dan the Chairman's refusal to discuss. The four days between the time Mr. Lee received the emailed questions and the time the story published strikes me as a fair amount of time for response.

If you would like to make the Chairman available to us -- or provide a statement -- we will gladly update the story. He has our questions in his email box.

There is more we need to discuss. Hopefully, soon.

I want you to understand the position Chairman Lee is putting us in. Since we last talked, I've learned he has routinely gone out of his way to avoid speaking to Dan. To shout down and berate a reporter who is trying to do his job, as he did last week, is unprofessional to say the least. I have learned this is not isolated. Practically all of Dan's efforts to engage the Chairman have been rejected by Chairman Lee shouting at him. Much of this predates you. But you should be aware that Chairman Lee is joined only by the twice indicted Clayton County sheriff as the only countywide official who effectively refuses to speak with us. In addition to that, our efforts to get basic information has become fraught with roadblocks and non-compliance. It has become such an issue in Clayton that the sheriff's behavior and that of his department has become a news story.

It's my hope that we can build on our earlier conversation. As you've made clear, the chairman prefers that you arrange interviews and speak for him when necessary. We will gladly abide by that process. But we will do so in the hope that it leads to the Chairman answering a few more questions directly. That doesn't mean we won't approach the chairman at a public meeting. Part of a reporter's basic duty is to question public officials at public meetings. Ultimately, the public expects to hear from the leaders they elect from time to time.

I'd like to make that happen with Chairman Lee and will do what we must to make it so. And if that requires a conversation that includes the chairman and our editor, I can arrange.

If we can hit the reset button, I'd love to do that.

Let me know if he's open to that.

Leroy Chapman Jr.
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From: Klepal, Dan (CMG-Atlanta) [<mailto:Dan.Klepal@ajc.com>]
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2015 3:25 PM
To: DiMassimo, Faye
Cc: Hankerson, David; Lee, Tim; lee8007@bellsouth.net; Duncan, Todd (CMG-Atlanta)
Subject: RE: AJC questions about Connect Cobb

Faye:

This will be the last time I reach out to you for this story. My deadline is approaching and there are many outstanding questions. Not only have the questions gone unaddressed, but you have not even responded to emails acknowledging their receipt. Unless the questions are answered, all of that will become part of my report. For your convenience, the questions are listed below. My deadline is 11 a.m. tomorrow – which means I need the answers before then.

- Why is BRT advantageous considering the EA acknowledges that the \$500 million version of BRT will make traffic congestion worse than the no build alternative?
- What is the definition of the build with improvements alternative? Can you please provide to me the details of the additional improvements studied in that scenario?

These questions deal with the attachment, an email exchange between Yvette Taylor and yourself. As you can see, Taylor asks about the accuracy of Cobb's claim that the LPA has been approved, "accepted" is the term used in the EA. You respond that the LPA continues "to be refined" through the EA process.

- If no LPA has been approved by the county elected leadership, how did the county move forward with the Environmental Assessment? I ask this because it appears that an LPA must be selected so a decision can be made about whether to pursue an EA or an EIS. From the Cobb website: 7.2 Next Steps As previously stated, the environmental analysis within this report will be considered in conjunction with an assessment of other factors such as ridership, land use, and costs to determine the LPA for the Cobb AA. While the type of documentation that will be required by FTA (EIS, EA, etc.) will not be determined until the selection of the LPA, the environmental issues identified in this report will be investigated in closer detail during the next phase of project development.
- Was the scaled back, \$500 million version of Connect Cobb compared to the alternatives studied in the AA? In other words, was the \$500 million version compared to the no build, light rail, heavy rail. If so, can you please provide to me those comparisons? If not, why? Isn't it important to have an accurate version of the proposed project compared against all the alternatives?
- Also, if the latest version of Connect Cobb was not compared to the other alternatives, is the FTA aware of that? Isn't it critical from FTA's perspective that an accurate version of the project be compared to the other alternatives? From the FTA website: FTA must base its approval on project entry into preliminary engineering in part on its finding on the acceptability of the alternatives analysis and the reliability of the information used to support a preferred alternative's New Starts project justification criteria.
- There appears to be a ton of documentation stating that an LPA MUST be selected before being in the public comment period of the EA. And yet you have told FTA that no LPA has been adopted by Cobb commissioners in the attached email exchange. Am I fundamentally misunderstanding the process, or the importance of the local jurisdiction adopting the LPA, or the importance of the county accurately communicating the status of the project to the federal government?
- You were quoted in the MDJ over the weekend as saying that you expect the BOC to vote on whether to proceed with Connect Cobb in September. Is that accurate? If so, what specifically will the BOC be voting on – approval of the New Starts grant application?

Thanks,

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